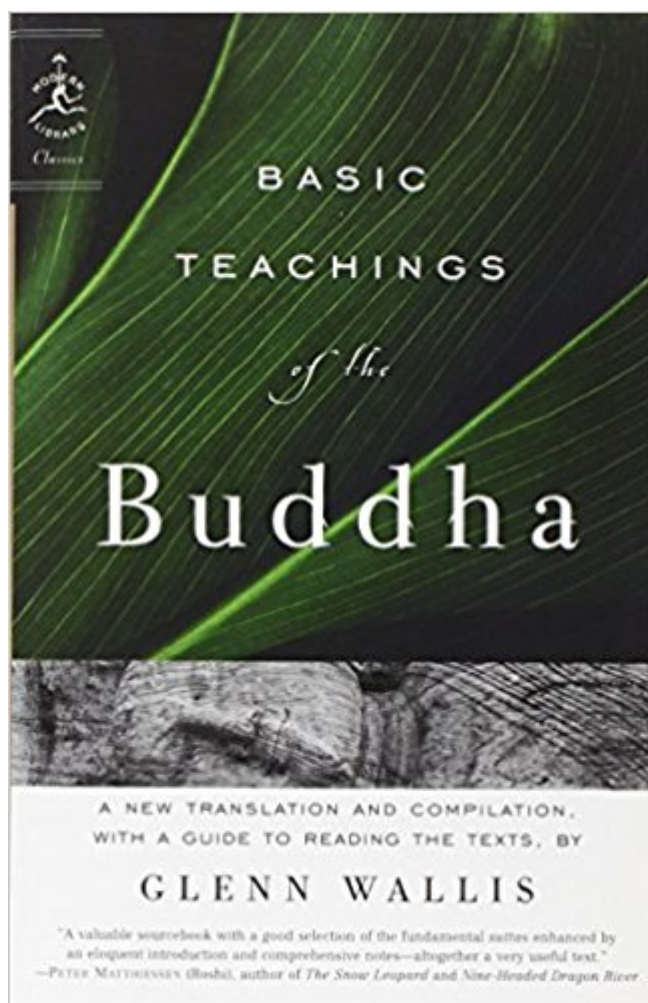


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# Basic Teachings Of The Buddha (Modern Library Classics)



## Synopsis

In *Basic Teachings of the Buddha*, Glenn Wallis selects sixteen essential dialogues drawn from more than five thousand Pali-dialect suttas of the Buddhist canon. The result is a vibrant introductory guide to studying Buddhist thought, applying its principles to everyday life, and gaining a deeper understanding of Buddhist themes in modern literature. Focusing on the most crucial topics for today's readers, Wallis presents writings that address modern psychological, religious, ethical, and philosophical concerns. This practical, inspiring, and engaging volume provides an overview of the history of Buddhism and an illuminating analysis of the core writings that personalizes the suttas for each reader. "Glenn Wallis brings wisdom and compassion to this work of scholarship. Everyone should read this book." —Christopher Queen, Harvard University "A valuable sourcebook with a good selection of the fundamental suttas enhanced by an eloquent introduction and comprehensive notes" —altogether a very useful text." —Peter Matthiessen (Roshi), author of *The Snow Leopard* and *Nine-Headed Dragon River* "Glenn Wallis's new and accessible translations of some of the Buddha's lectures to his original students, along with Wallis's elegant guide to the texts, gives twenty-first-century readers in the modern West a fresh chance to learn from this teacher." —Charles Hallisey, University of Wisconsin-Madison

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Siddhartha Gautama (Pali: Siddhatta Gotama) (ca. 480-400 B.C.E.), widely known as the Buddha (the awakened one), was an Indian mendicant whose lucid instructions on the overcoming of human unease form the basis of Buddhism. Glenn Wallis has a Ph.D. in Sanskrit and Indian Studies from Harvard. He is an associate professor of religion at the University of Georgia and teaches applied meditation at the Won Institute of Graduate Studies, near Philadelphia. Wallis is the author of *Mediating the Power of Buddhas* and the translator and editor of the Modern Library edition of *The Dhammapada*.

**Sutta 1 The Hawk Saku.nagghi Sutta; Sa.myuttanikā aya 5.47.6** The Buddha related this story to a group of his followers. Once, in the distant past, a hawk suddenly swooped down and seized a quail. As the quail was being carried away by the hawk, it lamented, "How unfortunate I am, what little merit I possess to have wandered out of my natural habitat into a foreign domain. If I had wandered within my native domain today, within my own ancestral, natural habitat, this hawk would certainly not have been a match for me in battle." "What is your native domain, quail? What is your own ancestral, natural habitat?" asked the hawk. The quail answered, "That clod of earth freshly tilled with a plow." Then the hawk, not boasting about its own strength, not mentioning its own strength, released the quail, saying, "Go, quail; but having gone there, you cannot escape me." Then the quail, having gone to the clod of earth freshly tilled with a plow, climbed onto the large clod of earth and, standing there, said to the hawk, "Come get me now, hawk, come get me now!" Now the hawk, not boasting about its own strength, not mentioning its own strength, folded up its wings and suddenly swooped down on the quail. When the quail fully realized that the hawk was coming, it got inside that clod of earth. And the hawk, striking against it, suffered a blow to its chest. So it is when someone wanders out of his or her natural habitat into a foreign domain. Therefore, do not wander out of your natural habitat into a foreign domain. Death will gain access [1.1]\* to the person who has wandered out of his or her natural habitat into a foreign domain, death will gain a footing. Now, what is for you a foreign domain, outside of your natural habitat? It is the fivefold realm of sensual pleasure [1.2]. Which five? Forms perceptible to the eye, which are pleasing, desirable, charming, agreeable, arousing desire, and enticing; sounds perceptible to the ear, which are pleasing, desirable, charming, agreeable, arousing desire, and enticing; scents perceptible to the nose, which are pleasing, desirable, charming, agreeable, arousing desire, and enticing; tastes perceptible to the tongue, which are pleasing, desirable, charming, agreeable, arousing desire, and enticing; tactile objects perceptible to the body, which are pleasing, desirable, charming, agreeable, arousing desire, and enticing. This is for you a foreign domain, outside of your

natural habitat. Death will not gain access to the person who lives within his or her native domain; within his or her own ancestral, natural habitat, death will not gain a footing. Now, what is your native domain, your own ancestral, natural habitat? It is the foundation of present-moment awareness [1.3] in four areas [1.4]. What are the four areas? Now, being ardent, fully aware, and mindful, and having put down longing and discontentment toward the world, live observing the body in and as the body, live observing feelings in and as feelings, live observing mind in and as mind, and live observing mental qualities and phenomena in and as mental qualities and phenomena.<sup>ji</sup> This is your native domain, your own ancestral, natural habitat.\* Numbers refer to notes in the Guide.

Unlike the myriad other books published under the premise of being a basic introduction to Buddhism, Wallis' cuts to the very heart of the Buddha's teaching by focusing on the Buddha's own words through referencing the Nikayas. In doing so, this introductory book emphasizes the interface of *theoria* and *praxis* whereas most spend undue time on *theoria*, as if there were some essence of Buddhism to be grasped through words and ideas. Wallis makes his case for the heart of Buddhism by drawing from 16 carefully selected suttas that delineate the steps along the path of liberation. The strength of this method comes from systematically presenting what the Buddha himself had to say about each of these stages. It seems that most introductory books summarize Buddhism leaving the reader with a vague sense of unease and disappointment wondering just where and how the Buddha actually taught these messages. Leaving the story telling to the Buddha himself I found to be very effective. This book is also arranged in such a way that mirrors self-cultivation (*bhavana*), beginning with the mind of incorrect discernment (*avidya*) and ending with the clear-seeing, awakened mind. This strikes me as slightly analogous to the layout of the Ten Ox-Herding Paintings, to a degree. But instead of ten frames, Wallis uses six sections, citing 16 suttas to do so. I find this intuitive layout to be exceedingly powerful for articulating the Buddhist path. So that a potential reader can get a better idea as to what he/she is getting into, I've provided here a brief thematic outline of Wallis' work. The first section of this work is called "habitat" which draws from "the hawk" (*sakunagghi sutta*) which demonstrates that we are not actually in our original abode. As mentioned, this begins with the deluded mind suggesting the very natural and intuitive beginnings of self-cultivation. The second section, "de-orientation," relies upon the famous "a talk with Malukya" (*culamalukya sutta*), "threefold knowledge" (*tevijja sutta*), and "discourse in Kesamutta" (*Kesamutti sutta*). This section explains the source of our infatuation with the unreal and the means to overcome it, which is knowing for ourselves. The third section, "re-orientation," draws

from "the all" (sabba sutta), "ball of foam" (phenapindupama sutta), "evidence of selflessness" (anattalakkhana sutta), and "the burden" (bhara sutta). This section emphasizes the immediacy of our original domain, which is the sensorium, and how much of what we assume or infer to be real is actually ephemeral and an utter mis-investment of energy. The fourth, "map," draws from the "turning of the wheel" (dhammacakkapavattana sutta) and "Gotama's discourse" (Gotama sutta). This point introduces the "preeminent realities," which is Wallis' de-pretense-ified translation of the Four Noble Truths. This, Wallis explains, is simply the way reality functions and as such is in no need of the title "Truth with a capital T." The fifth section, "destination," draws from "destination" (parayana sutta), "quenched" (nibbuta sutta), "signs of the fabricated" (sankhatalakkhana sutta) and "signs of the unfabricated" (asankhatalakkhana sutta). It explains the destination of the Buddhist path, which is leaving behind identity with the specious and identifying with the real, which is the unfabricated, the immediate, the impermanent and interconnectedness. The last section is "going" which draws from the buddha's two explicit suttas for the instruction of meditation, which are the anapanasati sutta and the satipatthana sutta. These are the means for engaging in the dynamism of the real through very basic and straightforward attention to the breath. Overall, I find the method employed to teach Buddhism in this book to be extremely useful as it centralizes praxis and the lived application of Buddhism, at all times tying Buddhist fundamentals to lived experience and using the Buddha's very words (albeit translated into the English) to do so. I do see room for some to be overwhelmed by how this book will ask the reader to think about Buddhism and the world in general as the introspective and psychological nature of this book (and what the Buddha taught in general) makes it difficult to hold the material at arm's length for a "proper" objective study. Here, the reader is really the topic of the book ("To study the Buddha Way is to study the self."), so it may be prudent to read this book alongside of something a little more light and less existential.

I'm reading this book as a member of Sutta Study Group organized by my local Insight Meditation Circle. Mr. Wallis is both an excellent Buddhist scholar and a very talented expository writer. He makes sense of some of the obscure language used in some of the suttas. Plus, the 16 suttas he chose to include in the book are arranged in an order which leads the reader to greater and greater understanding of what the Buddha said (and why he said it).

I had read a few "basic introduction" books about Buddhism in the late 1990s, as well as the Dao Deh Jing, doing my own study on comparative religion and/or philosophy. In 2008 I started reading books about Buddhism again. This book by Glenn Wallis was one of the first ones I read at that

time. That book was loaned to someone (still can't remember who it was). so I was happy to see that I could get the Kindle version for a very reduced price because I had previously purchased a print copy. However, that's not a reason why I give the book five stars. What I liked about this book was that it was easy to pick up the concepts of Theravada Buddhism. The selection of suttas was also appealing to me, I like having more than one translation of suttas that I find significant, so even if the criticisms of one reviewer are valid, I still find this set of translations worthwhile to earn. I converted from Christianity to 12er Shia Islam in 1999. That does not stop me from finding things to like about Buddhism. The afore-mentioned reviewer was also critical of the "theism" he detected in this book. While I sometimes run into a Buddhist here and there who is critical of my theist beliefs, most Buddhists, whether atheist or not, have no problem with my Theism. As a 12er Shia Muslim, I respect the beliefs of others, so I never criticize those Buddhists who are Atheists anyway. In practice, I follow the Anapanasati Sutta and the Mahasatipatthana Sutta. This led me first to books by Bhikkhu Bodhi and Thich Nhat Hanh. I really enjoyed Hanh's books "Breathe, You are Alive!", "The Miracle of Mindfulness" and "Living in the Present Moment", and the original edition of "For a Future To Be Possible", the one with the essays written by other Buddhist writers. As for biographies of the Buddha, I very much enjoyed Hanh's "Old Paths, White Clouds", but I would recommend Bhikkhu Bodhi's "In the Buddha's Words: An Anthology of Discourses From the Pali Canon". Although Thich Nhat Hanh is still my favorite Zen Buddhist author, I find that I like Shohaku Okumura's and Taigen Dan Leighton's books on Dogen very much. As a Muslim, I originally followed the Anapanasati Sutta when reciting the 99 Names of God (Allah), which of course is not what most Buddhists would do. Later, I would follow this practice whenever I wanted to settle my mind down and when I was anxious about something, but now I try to find a time to breathe this way every day. Recently, I saw "Old Paths, White Clouds" for sale at a popular online Muslim webstore in the Sufism section, so I'm not the only Muslim who finds some Buddhist teachings useful. But then, several Muslim scholars believe the Buddha was a Prophet God. But, don't tell the Taliban that, they won't agree. I recommend this book by Glenn Wallis, as well as his book on the Dhammapada to those who want to learn some basic Buddhist concepts.

Dr. Wallis is more than a mere translator. He is a compassionate teacher who doesn't want students of Buddhism to lose the forest for the trees. His Basic Teachings of the Buddha is his own Kesamutti Sutta (Kalama Sutta), a call to us (modern practitioners) to investigate Gotama's teachings by taking them up and discovering for ourselves which are beneficial in leading to joy and ease and which---considering our very real separation from Gotama's life experience socially, culturally,

etc.---may not be.I wish you all luck, fellow seekers.

Wallis is a good teacher. "Basic Teachings of the Buddha", like Walpola Rahula's "What the Buddha Taught" is an excellent introduction to Buddhism. "Basic Teachings", like "What the Buddha Taught" reflects the Theravada school. I consider that a "Plus".

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